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ABSTRACT

This handbook, designed for limited-English-proficient students in Alberta (Canada) schools, provides general information on schools and curricula, high school graduation requirements, and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learning. It describes the overall organization of school divisions and age-grade placement, the school year schedule, program choices, age limits to high school enrollment, general expectations of teachers and students, summer school, night school, correspondence study, awarding and accumulation of high school credits, academic class organization and numbering system, courses required for a high school diploma, grading and examinations, available counseling and guidance services, ESL instructional levels, mainstreaming, tips for native language maintenance, and techniques for learning English more quickly. (MSE)

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

STUDENT HANDBOOK

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE – STUDENT HANDBOOK

Are you a high school student who needs information on schools in Alberta and English as a second language (ESL) programs? If so, this booklet is for you.

You will find information about:

- how schools and courses in Alberta are organized
- how to get a high school diploma
- what kinds of ESL programs are available
- what you can do to learn English more quickly.

If you need more information, talk to your teacher or the counsellor in your school.

HOW ARE SCHOOLS ORGANIZED IN ALBERTA?

There are 12 grades in Alberta, grouped as follows:

Grades	Age	Division
1 - 6	6 - 12 years	Elementary
7 - 9	12 - 15 years	Junior High
10 - 12	15 - 18 years	Senior High



When you enter senior high school, you are placed in classes on the basis of your age and documents about your previous education. You will take an English language test to decide on the kind of ESL program support you will need. The number of regular academic courses you can take, such as science, mathematics and social studies, will depend on how much English you understand now and the speed at which you progress in your ESL classes.

You graduate from senior high school when you successfully complete enough courses for an Alberta high school diploma. You may then decide to enter the workforce or to continue your education.

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Your high school courses and marks will determine if you can continue your education at a community college, technical institution or university. Your school counsellor can help you choose the courses you need for your career plans.

The school year is ten months long, divided into two semesters. Semester I goes from September to January and Semester II goes from February to June.

WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS?

Senior high schools in Alberta offer many different choices:

- an academic program for university admission;
- a general program for students who do not plan to go to university but want to go to a community college, an institute of technology or enter the work force immediately;



a program of vocational and technical studies for students who want specialized business, industrial or work experience training;

a fine arts program for students who want to specialize in music, art and drama; or

an integrated occupational program (I.O.P) that prepares students for direct entry into the work force. It begins in Grade 8 for students who have difficulty with the regular school program.

HOW LONG MAY I STAY IN HIGH SCHOOL?

By law, students must stay in school until they are sixteen years old. But, you may stay in school if you are 19 years or younger on September 1. You may stay in school during the whole year, even if you turn 20 on September 2. After that time, the government will no longer pay for your education. You may continue to take courses toward a high school diploma by going to night school, but you will have to pay for these courses yourself.

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WILL SCHOOLING IN ALBERTA BE DIFFERENT FROM MY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES?

The education system in Alberta may be very different from your previous educational experience. In Alberta we believe that:

how you learn is as important as what you learn.

Students learn when they participate, share, listen, research, report and explore to find an answer; students need to develop knowledge, thinking skills and creative abilities;

teachers must meet individual student needs, abilities and learning styles.



In your school, students may spend a good part of the school day doing different assignments, working in groups, and talking with the teacher.

As a student, it is good for you to observe, ask questions and ask for help when you don't understand what to do.

WHAT ABOUT SUMMER SCHOOL, NIGHT SCHOOL AND CORRESPONDENCE?

You can also take high school courses during the summer, during the evening or by correspondence. You must pay for these courses yourself.

Summer school takes place during the months of July and August. You may take one five-credit or two three-credit courses.

Night school takes place during the early evening, about 7 to 10 p.m.

Correspondence (distance education) allows you to complete lessons on your own and send them to an instructor for marking.

You may do this while you take other courses at school or while you work during the day.

Distance education courses, summer school and night school are good opportunities for you to speed up your education or to finish your diploma requirements without spending full days in school.

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WHAT IS A HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT?

In Alberta, senior high school education is organized around a system of credits. A credit usually represents 25 hours of course-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes. You earn credits when you get a final mark of 50% or more for a course.

Most courses are worth either 3 or 5 credits. Generally, a three-credit course takes a half-year (one semester) to complete and a 5-credit course takes a year (two semesters) to complete. In some schools you can finish a five-credit course in one semester. In that case, you take fewer courses and spend twice as much time in class per day for that course.

You must earn at least 100 credits to receive an Alberta high school diploma. The time it takes to get your diploma will depend on how quickly you earn the 100 credits and pass all the courses you need for your future plans. It takes most students three years to do this.

It may be useful for you to know that you do not necessarily need a high school diploma for university admission. In Alberta, you can enter university when you finish five courses at the "30" level. The five courses and the marks you need will depend on the faculty you want to enter. Your counsellor can give you this information.

HOW ARE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL COURSES ORGANIZED?

In senior high school, courses are numbered by grade level and level of difficulty. For example, students in Grade 10 begin with Mathematics 10, Mathematics 13 (less difficult) or Mathematics 14 (even less difficult and more practical). Grade 11 courses usually begin with a "2" and Grade 12 courses with a "3." Students must get at least 50% in a "10" level course before they can take a "20" level course and so on.

The academic courses usually end in a "0". Students need these courses to enter university. The less difficult courses end in "3". They usually prepare students for programs at a community college, an institute of technology, or for direct entry into the workforce.

When you take courses that end in a "3" you can still take university entrance courses. For example, you can first take Mathematics 13, 23, 33, and then take Mathematics 30. This allows you to enter university, but it will take you longer.

If one of your courses is too difficult, you can change courses or "drop" that course. Many schools offer tutoring for students in difficulty. Talk to your school counsellor before you decide to change or drop a course.

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HIGH COURSES ARE REQUIRED FOR A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA?

Of the 100 credits you need for a high school diploma, 62 of those credits are for courses that you must take:

Grade 10:

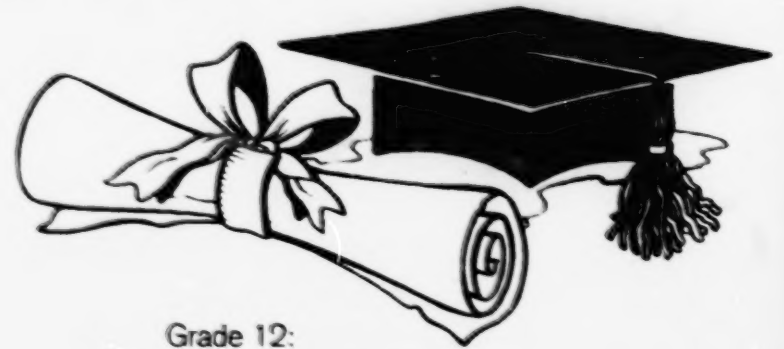
English 10 or 13 (5)
Social Studies 10 or 13 (5)
Math 10, 13 or 14 (5)
Science (5)
Physical Education 10 (3)

Grade 11:

English 20 or 23 (5)
Social Studies 20 or 23 (5)
Math (3)
Science (3)
Career & Life Management 20 (3)

Grade 12:

English 30 or 33 (5)
Social Studies 30 or 33 (5)
Credits in at least two more
courses beginning with a
"3" (10)



The above courses, plus an additional 38 credits, are the minimum requirements for a high school diploma. Your future career plans and/or interests will help you decide which courses to take for your additional credits. Your school counsellor can help you make good choices.

WHAT ABOUT MARKS AND EXAMS?

Senior high schools usually give four report cards per year, at the middle and end of each semester. The marks for your courses come from the results of tests and from work done in class, such as projects and assignments.

Your report card marks are based on your knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, your teachers will also use their observations and interviews with you to report on your progress.

The percentages for marks in Alberta are:

Letter	Equivalent	Percent
A	80 - 100%	Excellent
B	65 - 79%	Good
C	50 - 64%	Satisfactory
F	0 - 49%	Failure

Diploma examinations in seven of the "30" level courses count for 50 percent of your final mark. But, many ESL students write only one or two of these exams during the same semester. All students must write either the English 30 or English 33 diploma examination. Your school handbook will give you more information.

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WHO CAN I TALK TO AT MY SCHOOL?

When you have questions or difficulties, you can talk to your ESL teacher, counsellor or someone else in the school whom you trust.

Your counsellor can:

- give you information on many academic and personal topics;
- make changes to your timetable;
- help you plan for the future (careers, post-secondary studies); and
- advise you or refer you to another agency when you have personal problems or concerns.



he English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

HY ARE THERE SPECIAL ESL PROGRAMS?

Many students new to Canada go through a period of cultural adjustment. They may experience feelings of confusion, helplessness and conflict as they adjust to life in a different culture.

Special ESL classes can help you deal with and adjust to a new language, cultural values, customs and social expectations. These classes are also the best way to give you practical language instruction.

ESL classes will help you:

- learn better in the regular classroom;
- learn English more quickly; and,
- participate more fully in the life of the school.

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WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL ESL CLASSES?

If your high school has an ESL program, you can take English 10A, 10B and 10C. These are special ESL classes.

You take **English 10A** if you have little or no experience with spoken and written English. This course will help you develop basic communication skills. You get no credits since you spend only as much time in this course as necessary to achieve basic fluency in English.

English 10B is a five-credit course to help you develop the necessary language ability to succeed in high school subjects such as social studies, science and mathematics.

English 10C is a five-credit course to prepare you for the regular English 10 or 13 course. In some schools, you must take these ESL courses and pass them before you take English 10 or 13.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM?

You can benefit very much from receiving special help for a certain period of time. But, it is also important for you to spend time in classes with your English-speaking classmates. Lessons in the regular classroom give you a chance to:

- hear English spoken by your English-speaking classmates;
- experience the use of English in everyday situations;
- continue learning at your academic level in courses such as mathematics and science;
- develop confidence and motivation by participating in some of the same activities as your English-speaking classmates.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE ME TO LEARN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

Students learn at different rates. How fast or how slowly you learn will depend on your age, health, motivation, attitude, personality, learning style, abilities, needs, previous education, and experiences.

Within two years, most ESL students have developed adequate conversational English skills.

The length of time you need to develop the skills for successful learning in the regular classroom will take longer.

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How CAN I EXPECT ENGLISH-SPEAKING CLASSMATES TO TREAT ME?

Most Canadian students are interested in learning about other cultures and hearing about your experiences. Begin with a smile. Talk to the person beside you in your class, or the people near your locker.

Join a club or a sports team. Extra-curricular activities are good opportunities for you to meet and work with English-speaking classmates.

If you feel you are a victim of racism, you should talk to your ESL teacher, counsellor, school principal or someone else you trust.



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- don't be afraid to guess at the meaning of words you don't understand (use the surrounding words to help you);
- don't be afraid to ask a friend or your teacher what something means;
- don't be afraid to ask the speaker to repeat if you did not understand;
- use English whenever you can; and,
- **keep on trying**, even when you make mistakes!

We wish you much success in learning English and in adjusting to your new life in Canada. At first you may feel frustrated and disappointed in your performance. However, this does not mean that you don't have the knowledge, skills or intelligence. Learning a language takes time, so just keep on trying.

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SHOULD I SPEAK MY FIRST LANGUAGE AT HOME?

Although it is important to learn English, you should not stop speaking your first language at home. When you speak your first language at home you:

- reinforce and transfer to English what you have learned in your first language;
- receive the personal and academic benefits of being bilingual; and,
- communicate better with your family.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP ME LEARN ENGLISH QUICKLY AND WELL?

- start with easier courses that you like in your first language (if possible);
- listen to radio and television;
- listen to stories on tape (available from the library);
- sing or talk along with music;
- read newspapers and magazines;
- read English translations of books you have already read in your first language;

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